Jan. 5, 1927 Vol. XXVI, No. 1

WASHINGTON and LEE UNIVERSITY BULLETIN

Rev. William MacCutchan Morrison, D. D.

An address delivered by Rev. L. W. Irwin, D.D., in Lee Chapel, Washington and Lee University, June 7, 1926.

LEXINGTON, VA.

Published by the University Twenty-Four Times a Year

Entered as second-class matter by the Post Office at Lexington, Va., April 8, 1913, under Act of August 24, 1912.

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William MacCutchan Morrison

THE MISSIONARY AS PIONEER OF CIVILIZATION

By L. W. Irwin, D.D.

If the influence of missionaries on the civilization of the world through their contribution to geography, science, language, and literature were written it would be a most notable record of their part in the advancement of the human race. The progress of Christianity is also the key to the progress of modern civilization. From the earliest days the missionaries alone have been moved by love to Christ and humanity to cast their lot in the dark places of earth and give their labor and lives to preaching the Gospel, and they have also been among the foremost pioneers in exploration, in geography, and language study. The purely scientific motive is not sufficient to cause students to bury themselves in the heart of Africa, or China, or the islands of the Pacific, solely for the purpose of giving to the world a correct knowledge of the languages, races, or products of these countries. Nor is the commercial motive adequate. The trader has ever followed, not preceded, the missionary. It is only the missionaries as a class who have had a motive strong enough to impel men and women of the highest intelligence and training to go to the uttermost parts of the earth and hold them to the study of language until it resulted in reducing a spoken language to writing and producing a literature adequate to the needs of the people.

A galaxy of the names of missionaries constitutes an honor roll of heroes of the faith and pioneers of civiliza-

Source Unknown

tion. To mention but a part of them: Ulfilas in the fourth century who gave the Goths their Bible; Patrick of Ireland in the fifth century, educator; Columba in the sixth century, at Iona, founder of Missionary schools; Ziegenbalg, Schwartz, and Cary in India, translators and educators; Morrison and Parker in China; Hepburn, Brown, and Verbeck in Japan; Allen, Underwood, and our own Reynolds in Korea; in Turkey, Cyrus Hamlin, the founder of Roberts College, the chief factor in the transformation of Turkey; in Africa, Livingstone, Moffatt, Mackenzie, Mackey of Uganda, Huntington, Lapsley, Mary Slesser, Shepherd, and Morrison; in the South Sea Islands, John Williams, John Geddie, and John G. Paton; in Asia Minor, Smith, Dwight, and Grant. Time would fail to tell of hundreds of others whose contributions to geography, language, agriculture, commerce, government, literature, invention, and science have been of incalculable value to the world's advancement. Through their labors, incidental to preaching the Gospel, they have been instrumental in abolishing slavery, stopping the cruel exploitation of natives by traders, breaking down the caste system, developing philanthropy, elevating woman, fostering a new home life, founding educational institutions, making a literature, improving agriculture, introducing machinery, building hospitals, affording scientific medical training for doctors and nurses. [In passing it is worthy of note that two Southern negro missionaries have received signal recognition of their work. Shepherd was made a Fellow of the Royal Geographic Society of England for explorations in the Congo. Edmiston received recently the Medal of the Order of the Lion by the King of Belgium for eminent work in promoting agriculture. Rev. Motte Martin has recently been knighted by the Belgium King for signal services for the people in the Congo.]

In honoring ourselves today by erecting a tablet to one of the most self-sacrificing, heroic, and distinguished alumni of this University it may be well to consider him and his work as a contribution to the civilization of humanity.

It is always interesting, in studying a great character, to go back to origins. No great life is an accident but has its genesis in an appropriate past. William MacCutchan Morrison was born in Rockbridge county, Virginia, near Lexington, on November 10, 1867. His father, Luther Morrison and his mother, Mary Agnes MacCutchan, as indicated by their names, were of the sturdy Scotch-Irish stock which so largely settled the Valley of Virginia. His parents were both people of sound judgment, practical common sense and earnest piety who commanded the confidence of all who knew them. Dedicated to God in infancy, he was reared in a religious atmosphere of this Christian home and received his training here and in the local school.

On the farm he learned to work and developed a fine physique which enabled him to endure the long and hard journeys on evangelistic work. His contact with the negro hands gave him an interest in, and understanding of, and sympathy for the negro race. As a boy he used to read to them on rainy days in the hay loft.

At the age of sixteen he entered Washington and Lee University and was conscientious, thorough, and prompt in work and especially distinguished himself in the literary society, winning in his second year the Orator's medal.

His entire boyhood was spent under the ministry of Rev. D. A. Penick, pastor of New Monmouth Church, a man of the highest culture, wisdom and spirituality whose ministry was fruitful in many young lives directed to great spheres of service.

He united with the church at the age of nineteen, and upon leaving College spent six years in teaching, which was an important element in his training for future work.

Yielding to a call to the ministry he entered Louisville Theological Seminary and while there decided to devote his life to mission work in Africa. On November 7, 1896, he sailed for Africa and reached Luebo after a tedious journey of six months. The rest of his life of twenty years was spent at Luebo, with the exception of two furloughs of a year each at home—a life of incredible toil and hardship, yet of wonderful influence and permanent results.

On his first furlough he married Miss Bertha Stebbins, who returned with him to Africa, and whose beautiful character and deep spirituality and devoted labors made a deep impression upon the natives. After four years of this happy companionship she succumbed to the terrible African fever and was laid to rest at Luebo, and Morrison again threw himself with redoubled energy into his work. The strenuous work and the strain of presiding and acting as host and advisor at a meeting of the Conference of Protestant Missions held at Luebo proved too much for a body already depleted by years of incessant toil. It was the last straw upon an overburdened life and before the meeting was over it was noticed that he was unwell. Despite the best medical attention and loving care, he grew rapidly worse and within a week his malady, the terrible tropical dysentery, was beyond control and he sank into unconsciousness and on March 14th this great heroic soul quietly fell to sleep. He was laid to rest beside his wife at Luebo. He had literally worn himself out by twenty years of incessant and arduous labor.

The three outstanding features of Dr. Morrison's life that will be dwelt upon are his work as *Linguist*, as

Champion of the Oppressed, and as *Missionary Executive,* bearing in mind that *these,* great and far-reaching as they were, are but subordinate and adjuncts to his chief work of preaching the Gospel and winning these benighted souls to Christ and training them in Christian character and effective service for Christ. These three characteristics are chosen since they best illustrate the contribution Dr. Morrison made to the missionary as a pioneer of civilization.

LINGUIST AND TRANSLATOR

On his arrival in the Congo Morrison found that though the principles of the language had been worked out by others and there was a small dictionary of a few hundred words, there had been little systematic work done and all previous material had to be worked over.

The first step was to learn the language by gathering words from the natives, then learn to speak it. Next an alphabet must be adopted and the language reduced to writing, its laws ascertained, studied, a grammar formulated, and a dictionary made. After this came the work of translating school books, Bible paraphrases and hymns into the language. The language thus made ready for use had to be taught to the natives. Morrison's own words will convey an idea of the magnitude of the task he had undertaken. In his diary he says: "I am almost oppressed with discouragement when I think of Bible translation. Three great monsters rise up before me in the darkness: first of all the work is with the very bottom of humanity—perhaps as low as the lowest, with an unbroken history of perhaps thousands of years of ignorance, superstition and spiritual darkness. Another difficulty is the fact that all the customs, manners, pursuits, and minds of the people are so different from the people described in Bible history. But perhaps the greatest diffi-

culty of all and the most discouraging is the fact that after I have spent many weary years in translation work, not one man can read a word of what I have written. In the majority of mission lands, the people can read, and a great work can be done, at once, in translating the Bible and in writing religious tracts. But here in Africa that important means of spreading the truth can not be employed. In fact I have not seen a single character that seems to indicate the most remote conception of a written language."

It is usually regarded that when a fair knowledge of a foreign language has been acquired with the aid of competent instructors, a well prepared grammar, dictionaries, and extensive literature a creditable thing has been done. But to take the language by ear, word by word, and sentence by sentence, learn to speak it, give it an alphabet, write it down, learn its laws of inflection and construction, make a grammar and a dictionary, create a literature and then teach the natives to read and write their own languages gives some conception of the greatness of the task he undertook.

Notwithstanding the difficulties that would have appalled another man, that he did the work and did it well, is testified by the fact that in eight months he was able to speak with a degree of satisfaction in the Baluba tongue, and in three years he had accomplished the task of reducing to writing the Baluda and Bena Lulua dialects and finishing a grammar of 416 pages. The thoroughness and accuracy of the work is evidenced by the statement of other missionaries "that after twelve years of cumulative experience not one flaw or error has been found in this marvelous book." In addition to this work he also translated some of the Parables and Miracles, paraphrased other portions of the Bible, and prepared a

catechism which is taken today as the basis of instruction of all inquiries in the Mission, also a hymn book and school books. Confronted with the difficulty of translating the Bible into a language which had no terms to express many of the ideas of the Bible he prepared a paraphrase of the Bible entilted "Lessons from the Whole Bible", a work of 532 pages published on his second furlough in 1913. All this was preparatory to the great objective of a translation of the entire Bible. Just before his death he completed the translation of the Four Gospels and book of Acts. *In the last few months* the announcement has been made that the dream of Morrison had been fulfilled by the publication of the entire Bible in the Baluba-Lulua language under the supervison of Rev. T. C. Vinson, his biographer and for many years his collaborator in the work of translation.

All this was done in the midst of the most arduous and exacting life of the missionary who must be at once, lexicographer, publisher, printer, editor, physician, mechanic, farmer, bookkeeper, store keeper, teacher, "palaver" settler, correspondent, advisor, pastor, preacher, and in addition the legal representative of the entire Mission. Most of the work was done by Morrison in his own hand as he had no stenographer or clerk. This alone was enough to have filled the mind and hand of an ordinary mortal.

Of the Grammar and Dictionary Sir Harry H. Johnston, an eminent explorer and authority on Africa, wrote to Dr. Morrison in acknowledging a complimentary copy, "I need hardly say it is one of a very high order and worthy to rank with the best classical studies of the Bantu language family."

By this work millions of people in a territory of 600,000 square miles were given a written language, as

the means of education and access to the knowledge of the world, as the Bible, and started on the way to civilization and Christianity.

Upon the publication of this work the degree of Doctor of Divinity was conferred upon him by his Alma Mater.

CHAMPION OF THE OPPRESSED

In addition to his remarkable and arduous work on the language another outstanding feature of the life of this great man was his effectively espousing, from the first, the cause of the natives who were being exploited and oppressed by agents of the Belgian king Leopold and by concessionary companies formed for developing the resources of the Congo. The revelation of the brutalities practised in the Congo at this time came as a shock to the civilized world.

There were two phases of this episode in his life, first the exposure and denunciation and second the trial of Morrison and Sheppard for slander and their acquittal, before a Belgian court.

Upon his arrival in the Congo Morrison took note of the willful violation of treaty stipulations by the Belgian officials, in their discrimination against Protestant Missions and in the unspeakable cruelties practised upon the natives, in enforcing the production of rubber by concessionary companies. His protests against, and exposure of these practises, by letters to the officials themselves, by articles in periodicals and by publications in the Kasai Herald, the organ of the Mission, were most potent influences in arousing public sentiment to secure reform of the abuses.

On his first furlough one of the greatest of his accomplishments was the work he did on the *Continent,* in *England,* and in *America,* by exposing the flagrant viola-

tions of the treaty by which the Congo State had been erected, the wanton vandalism and destruction of resources of the country and the horrible cruelties practised upon the natives. With voice and with pen wherever he went he was unsparing of the indignities inflicted upon the natives in the Congo.

1903 In Belgium an ineffectual effort was made to have an audience with the King, but only an interview with some of the ministers was secured but without visible results. In England through the influence of Mr. Robert Whyte he was introduced to many leading men in public affairs whose interest he enlisted. He addressed a distinguished audience at Whitehall and had the unusual privilege of speaking before Parliament, besides writing articles in leading papers and magazines. Public sentiment was aroused and Parliament passed a resolution to the effect that "King Leopold stood impeached before the bar of Christendom for his high crimes and misdemeanors against humanity and more especially for his violation, wholesale and retail, of the provisions of the international act drawn up at Berlin in the years 1884-1885."

Even in Belgium a small group of reformers with Mr. Emile Vandervelde as leader denounced the inhuman practises of their king and demanded reform in the Congo.

In America Morrison threw himself with his whole soul into arousing public sentiment. In the courts of the Southern and the Northern Presbyterian Churches, in the Boston Peace Conference and through leading periodicals, by memorial to the Senate of the United States he endeavored to enlist the influence of our people and Government on behalf of the Congo. Though failing to secure the interposition of the Government, the pressure of public sentiment had its effect. Leopold under this pres-

sure of public opinion appointed a commission to investigate conditions in the Congo. It was a government investigating itself. This Commission was forced to bring in a report which in every particular sustained the charges brought by Morrison and other missionaries. This, together with a report of the British Consul to the same effect, resulted in Great Britain approaching the signatory powers of the Berlin and Brussels acts with a demand for reforms in the Congo. Through the efforts of the Congo Reform Association in England and America the Congo State was wrested from the hands of Leopold and made a colony. Untold relief was thus brought to *millions* of oppressed natives, by putting a stop to the grosser forms of inhumanity under which they had suffered.

The second stage of his Championship of the Oppressed was the spectacular indictment, trial and acquittal of Sheppard and Morrison by a Belgian court.

Most men would have regarded the splendid achievement already won as a sufficient performance of duty, but noting that widespread abuses still existed, Morrison continued his protest.

A long and voluminous correspondence with the officials of the State and the Kassai Rubber Company ensued after Morrison's first return from America. Notwithstanding all the Congo Reform Association had done, and the fair promises of Belgium, it was found that these reforms had not been very extensive, nor the promises fulfilled. In a letter to Dr. Chester, Morrison says, "Regarding the Congo State affairs—I need only say that we are not now suffering from the old forms of outrage so much—hand cutting, slave raiding, murdering, etc., but I am sorry to say that I believe the sum total of suffering is much more than it was formerly."

By this denunciation of the new and more refined system of oppression, through correspondence with State officials and through the Kassai Herald, the organ of the Mission which was circulated free throughout the Congo, Morrison became a marked man for revenge or riddance. This was accentuated by the fact that the exposure of the atrocities had caused a disastrous drop in the stock of the Kassai Rubber Company which in desperation and revenge they were trying to retrieve. Exception was taken to an article by Sheppard in the Kassai Herald and he and Morrison, as editor, were indicted and peremptorily summoned before a court at Leopoldville a thousand miles from home to be tried on a charge of slander with penalty of a fine of $16,000 or five years imprisonment.

Morrison, against whom the charges were aimed, in reality from the outset assumed the entire responsibility and onus of the trial. Notwithstanding the manifest haste, injustice, and arbitrary inconvenience imposed on Morrison there was no cringing, or flinching, or attempt at evasion, or retraction. He prepared to meet the ordeal with a sublime committal of his cause, which he felt to be the cause of millions of suffering natives, to the Supreme Judge of the Universe.

It is impossible to follow the progress and result of this trial which at the time attracted the attention of the civilized world. On the one side was a powerful and autocratic Government and wealthy Company and on the other two poor missionaries representing the cause of justice and humanity. They were fortunate in securing the services of Mr. Emile Vandervelde, one of the most talented and brilliant lawyers of Belgium who had already distinguished himself in his advocacy of reforms in the Congo, as their attorney. This able and prominent man voluntarily laid aside his official duties and, from

his interest in the oppressed Congo natives, came to Leopoldville without compensation and conducted the defense with such consummate skill and success that the charge against Sheppard was dismissed, the Kassai Rubber Company required to pay the costs and the charge against Morrison was summarily dropped.

The acquittal was a signal vindication of Morrison not only in the Congo, but before the world. Of it is said: "Out of the trial at Leopoldville there have come reforms which though far from complete, have outreached the sanguine hopes of the most optimistic and far sighted seer among the servants of God in the Congo at that time. It was a great moral victory and did more to convince the world of the true condition in the Congo than all the newspaper articles that had ever been written. Sir Conan Doyle said that Morrison on trial at Leopoldville was a more striking exponent of liberty than the Bartholdi statue in New York Harbor.

Recent statements of missionaries call attention to the marked change of attitude of the State Government to the work of missionaries, from indifference and antagonism to friendliness and appreciation. Judge Gorlia, the highest State official, at the funeral of Dr. Morrison read a paper eulogizing his work and expressing the appreciation of the State for his work for the uplift of the natives. On a recent visit to the Congo the Belgian crown prince warmly congratulated the Mission at Luebo for its success in treating the terrible sleeping sickness.

MISSIONARY EXECUTIVE

A large part of the work of every missionary is necessarily given to the direction and management of the machinery of the mission. But it is not this routine work that is now to be considered, but where Morrison ex-

ceeded the routine and went beyond in his sheer genius for administration and statesman-like grasp of conditions, opportunities, and means of meeting them.

Luebo more by his ability and force of character than by selection became the headquarters of the entire Mission and Morrison its brains. His biographer makes the statement "that the plans and policies of Dr. Morrison had been adopted and carried out by the entire Mission."

The first and far reaching policy originated by him was that of having every native who came under the influence of the Mission begin, as soon as possible, to teach some one else. This was consistently carried out from the lowest to the highest department of training. As soon as a child learned the alphabet he was put to teach it to another child; as soon as a native learned a bit of the Bible, the story of Jesus, he was started to telling it to others.

By just telling what they had learned of the Gospel to those they met, these unlettered youths sounded out the word of God in all the surrounding country. On the journeys through the jungle, in the evening when they stopped for the night, when they went foraging for food, everywhere, their "palver" was of Jesus. The same method was used in the Mission schools. Noting the youths of special aptitude they were given some training and then sent out into the surrounding country and villages to tell their story. With a leader's vision he seized upon the Society of Christian Endeavor to train the youth for service and from that work developed many of the most effective preachers, evangelists, church officers and workers among the natives. The Morrison Training School was established with the same idea of increasing the efficacy of the work of the youth already going out to tell the story of the Gospel. It is a notable fact that the

Church on the Congo is said to be the largest Presbyterian Church in the world. When he began work at Luebo the native christians were less than fifty, when he laid down his work there were more than 17,000. Mission stations increased from five to four hundred and fifty.

The development of the infant church in *self government* is credited to Dr. Morrison more than any one else. As the Luluas were degenerate and lazy, no one of that tribe was received into the church until he had raised and harvested a crop. In developing the workers, recognizing that the natives were like infants, lacking in self reliance and initiative, he adopted the policy of laying upon them as soon as possible the responsibilities of the work in order to train them in the qualities they lacked. The practical result of this policy is seen in the statement that most of the evangelistic work which reached thousands of natives was done *by the natives themselves,* not by white missionaries, and in the creditable efficiency with which they managed the affairs of their own church.

In 1913 a Theological Seminary was established largely through the work of Dr. Morrison. He also formed the plan of having an annual or semi-annual meeting of all workers of the Mission for conference, instruction, and inspiration.

With the broad vision of a true statesman and apostle his conception of his work was not merely to promote the Presbyterian Church in the Congo but the establishing of a native church to be developed by the natives themselves under the guidance of the missionaries. By his advice and aid missions were founded by the Methodists, under the leadership of Bishop Lambuth, and by the Mennonites, and the Disciples. From his thorough knowledge of the entire Congo region he was able to render signal

service in giving advice as to strategic points for mission stations. And to each of these missions he gave a nest egg of members and workers to start their work. It is notable that these native christians voluntarily gave up the advantages of the established station to go with their families into new regions for the purpose of sounding out the gospel.

He founded and for sixteen years edited the Kassai Herald, the organ of the Mission. This paper, circulated free in the Congo, was most influential in promoting reforms in the Congo and in unifying and promoting the work of the Mission.

He was twice elected president of the Conference of Protestant Missions in the Congo, composed of fourteen denominations. It was after the strain of presiding, entertaining, and conferring with the workers who came to the meeting at Luebo that he was stricken with the disease from which his depleted system found it impossible to rally.

In addition to the administrative work he was busy with the work of his own mission; superintending the teaching of trades, building, road making, farming, teaching, translating, publishing, editing, and making long evangelistic trips without the ordinary conveniences that are at hand in most mission fields. In the Congo there were no roads, no trains, no automobiles, no horses or oxen, no generally accepted currency, no markets for what the natives could raise, no telephones or telegraph, and at that time no radio by which the missionary might keep in touch with the world. Beside all this there was the opposition of the Roman Catholics, who had the ear of the Government; the indifference of the State officials who hampered the work by refusal or delays in granting mission sites and when granted sometimes revoking the

grant, transporting the natives, and ignoring and violating the treaty guarantees of religious liberty; and in addition to all this the influence of the lives of godless foreigners, the dire poverty of the natives, and the age long power of heathen superstitions and practises.

In and under it all we are given the picture of this great, heroic and consecrated soul fighting his battles and doing his work with untiring zeal and energy, refusing to take the customary furlough for rest, literally spending and being spent in the Master's work.

Again it must be borne in mind that all these great spheres of work were but a part and a means to his great objective which was to make Christ savingly known to these, almost the lowest of humanity.

Possibly the most impressive sight of this man of such extraordinary gifts of linguistic and executive genius is of his preaching the Gospel to these simple folk in their own tongue and after the toil of the day going his rounds of pastoral work, entering the huts of the natives, counselling, instructing and praying with them, as a father.

Some of the outstanding characteristics of this remarkable man are said by those who lived with him and knew him intimately to be, his entire consecration of himself to his work of preaching the Gospel, his utter selflessness in doing his work (Even when confined to his bed with fever he would be settling "pavalers" and directing evangelistic work. In his deep sorrow on the death of his wife he put aside his own feelings to comfort and instruct his people on the great mystery of death.), his absolute fearlessness, his remarkable self control under provocation, and in his own deep bereavement. Always courteous, he was especially tender and gentle with the natives and was remarkably tactful in dealing with the peculiarities of the African mind. This tactfulness in settling

disputes between hostile tribes won for him early in his work the name "Kuonyi Nshila", or "Permanent Path Opener."

In searching for the secret of such a life it is found in his entire self dedication to the service of his Master in the beginning, which to him meant the laying of all his great powers of strength, of mind, of will, and of heart at the feet of Christ to do His will; and then a life whose springs were fed by constant communion with God in prayer. It is said that he never undertook any work small or great without prayer. It was his habit to rise before dawn and spend the first hours of the day in prayer and meditation. On the long journey through the jungle he would go aside to pray. Said Bishop Lambuth, who spent many weeks in intimate fellowship with him, "The springs of that life were hidden in the depths of a conscious realization of the presence of God. An inner light shone unmistakeable as new forces were released during those hours given to intercession. There is a picture before me of a candle burning an hour before day every morning in an humble home in Luebo. Was it the lingering glow of its light or the illuminating power of God's word that gave Morrison's face at times its strange attractiveness and his life the strength for the exacting duties before him?"

For intellectual power and linguistic talent; for breadth of vision and charity to others; for self control under every form of trial; for utter selflessness; for courage in face of danger; for administrative ability of the first order; for clear-sighted wisdom; for originality in plans and policies for work; for depth of spirituality and ability to endure and perform hard work; William MacCutchan Morrison has had no superior in the mission force of his own church or of any church.

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The phenomenal efficiency of work done by men who were lately taken from savagery to witness for Christ; the remarkable rapidity of the growth of the Church in the Congo in numbers, in extent of territory and equipment; the implicit confidence of his fellow workers in the soundness and wisdom of his plans and decisions; the relief of hundreds of thousands of oppressed natives from the cruelties of gain-greedy officials and traders; the systematizing and giving written form to a language that reaches millions of people with the Gospel message; the giving a down-trodden benighted race a Christian civilization and educational system; the arousing to active protest the indignation of two continents against the Congo atrocities so effectively than an autocratic king and hostile government were forced to make reforms; the affording a permanent and practical policy of work for the missions on the Congo—these are some of the results which God by his grace accomplished through Morrison. Of him Dr. S. H. Chester, Secretary of Foreign Missions, in his church said, "We believe there would be universal agreement in the statement that Dr. Morrison was the greatest of modern missionaries in Africa, ranking with Livingstone and Moffatt, and MacKay of Uganda in ability and consecration and in the scope and influence of his work."

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